

City's west entrance focus of improvement

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With all the recent activity in Fairbanks Park, it's only proper that local residents remember past efforts to improve the western entrance to Terre Haute and the area west of Fifth Street.

At the request of Marx Meyers, owner of a clothing store at Fourth and Wabash, a group of citizens and property owners west of Fifth Street met May 2, 1923 at Memorial Hall. Articles of Association were drawn up with those objectives in mind, and plans outlined to build new buildings, repair old buildings, paint and generally clean up the area, and beautify the banks of the Wabash River and surrounding area, for the best interests of the community, general business and civic interests.

Named, "The Banks of the Wabash Association," charter members included Meyers, R. S. Rawley, Frank Temple, Sam Sterchi, Guy Jackson, James DeLoughrey, W. N. Cox, J. B. Sullivan, George Reiss, Harry Hamby, Charles Fortune, Sam Young, Lynn Hollis, George Krietenstein, Jerry Fitzgerald, H. M. Kunkler, Dan Miller and Carl E. Bauermeister Sr.

The first officers were Meyers, president; William E. Baugh, first vice president; Ed Meissner, second vice president; and John Sullivan, secretary. Working capital was needed to carry out plans and a total of \$8,225 was subscribed. The first project completed was the installing and maintaining of boulevard lights and flower boxes on the Wabash River bridge.

Later contributions assisted the Town Board of West Terre Haute to improve the pavement between the river bridge and West Terre Haute. Next came the extension of boulevard lights from Second Street to the bridge.

Further improvements included boat houses and a lagoon with boat landings on the east side of the river in Fairbanks Park. An unsightly junkyard on the south side of U.S. 40 was removed.

In August, 1923, Fred R. Waldron was elected secretary to serve with the other officers. The property at Third and Walnut was secured for \$500 and plans were made for a City Market. Later, a Grower's Market

Historically speaking



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was established at Second and Chestnut streets.

Through the efforts of the association and the Township Road Law, the paving of South Third and South First streets was completed in 1924. Later North First and North Water streets were paved. The association was responsible for the paving of Harding Avenue, Prairieton Road, Hulman, Voorhees, Willow, Osborne streets, North and South Second Street, and parts of Park, Crawford and Farrington streets.

The association worked with Congressman Noble Johnson on river navigation and flood control. The river was dredged and the west bank built up to prevent the usual flooding of the area in and around Taylorville (now Dresser).

Early in 1925, the association assisted in preventing the Highway Commission from rerouting U.S. 40 and U.S. 41 which were scheduled to bypass the city.

When the association learned that the Gaseteria Company was interested in locating near the west entrance of the city, the group was able to obtain the ground on the north side of Wabash Avenue at Water Street, where a switch was installed to permit loading and unloading the gasoline and oil products.

It was also in 1925 that the association was responsible for securing the James Royce farm south of the city for an airplane landing field called first Paul Dresser Field, and later named Paul Cox Airport. Government recognition for the airport was secured, and it was identified on all C.A.A. maps.

The survey was completed and

construction work started for Dresser Drive from Wabash Avenue to Fairbanks Park. Dirt from the grading of South Third Street was used to fill in the low places. The original plan was to continue Dresser Drive north to Maple Avenue, with road markings east to Fruitridge Avenue, then south to Hulman Street, completing the circle around the city.

Following this came the condemnation of the old City Hall building at Fourth and Walnut streets. It was largely through the efforts of the association's president, Fred R. Waldron, that the present site of the City Hall on South Second Street was chosen.

Waldron was also responsible for disposing of the site of the old city hall to H. N. Oakley for \$14,000, making the total cost of the new site only \$7,500. This one project alone more than justified the existence of the Banks of the Wabash Association.

Realizing that there had never been any recognition or public appreciation shown for the many benefactions to the city of Chauncey Rose, the association hired architects Miller and Yeager to plan a Chauncey Rose Memorial, using the stones and marble columns of the old Post Office building. This memorial was completed and dedicated in 1936 in Fairbanks Park. In 1982, it was restored and put in good order again.

Activities of the association declined to occasional meetings of the officers. Some of the active members had moved away, others were deceased, but in 1955 Carl E. Bauermeister Jr. was elected president; M.D. Cohen, first vice president; J. N. Hollis, second vice president; and V.S. Meister, secretary-treasurer.

Directors included Carl E. Bauermeister Sr., Fred R. Waldron, James Palmer, Richard Adamson, Garland Cooper, Julian L. Silversstein and William Tearman.

Soon after reorganizing, the group decided to disband and turn over remaining funds in the treasury to the Vigo County Historical Society for its museum which opened in May, 1958.